

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

JUSTICE FOR VICTIMS OF TRAFFICKING ACT

Mrs. SHAHEEN. Mr. President, I rise today to speak on an amendment that I was pleased to include in the human trafficking legislation that was passed earlier today. The amendment was based on the Human Trafficking Survivors Relief and Empowerment Act, which I introduced several weeks ago.

It has a simple purpose. It provides an incentive for States to enact laws that allow human trafficking survivors to clear their criminal records of prostitution and other low-level, non-violent crimes that they can reasonably demonstrate were the result of being trafficked.

Many States, including my home State of New Hampshire, have vacatur laws in place. However, we need to ensure that survivors of human trafficking have access to these types of protections no matter where they are rescued, or what State they were forced to commit crimes in.

When I first introduced this legislation, I shared the story of a young woman named Katie featured in a recent NPR story on vacatur laws. In the story, she spoke about her heart-breaking experience as a trafficking victim.

Katie talked about being raped at age 11, and at age 13 being forced into commercial sex.

She talked about having her skull cracked and ribs broken, and about the regular beatings that resulted in bruises and black eyes. She talked about 7 years of the worst kinds of physical and emotional torture, and being transported nearly 1,400 miles from her home.

But Katie also talked about her recovery—about rebuilding a life with her family and young son, about working hard to make a better life.

According to Katie, one of the most important things we can do for these survivors, these brave young men and women, is to give them the tools to start over.

As Katie told NPR, “I’m not ever going to forget what I’ve done, but at the same time, I don’t want it thrown in my face every time I’m trying to seek employment.”

Survivors of human trafficking are victims of a crime. Yet often it is the victims who are arrested, detained, prosecuted, and convicted.

Records of these crimes, can follow survivors for life. These records limit access to safe housing and good jobs. They can even bar access to car loans and educational opportunities. They leave trafficking survivors with few options, and in some cases drive individuals back to engaging in commercial sex.

Vacatur laws help victims start fresh. They are a critical part of recovery

and should be available in every State, and my amendment will help us achieve that goal.

I will close by sharing comments that Katie’s mom recently sent to my office. It think it clearly demonstrates what is possible when survivors are given the time and support they need to recover.

She wrote:

As a mother and as a woman watching all those years, being totally overwhelmed by hopelessness AND helplessness, I can see a positive . . . I think the 11 year old girl I lost is coming back to me . . . as a woman—a little battle weary but stronger and happier and filled with so much hope.

We want this kind of new beginning for every victim of trafficking. And that is exactly what this provision will help accomplish. I want to thank my colleagues for their support, and hope this bill will move quickly through the House and to the President for signature into law.

ARMENIAN GENOCIDE 100TH ANNIVERSARY

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, I rise to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Armenian genocide, widely recognized as the first genocide of the 20th century.

April 24, 1915 marked the beginning of a horrific period in our world’s history and for the Armenian people. On this day, agents of the Ottoman Empire rounded up and executed Armenian community leaders, poets, and intellectuals. What ensued was the systematic extermination of 1.5 million Armenian men, women and children at the hands of the Ottoman Turkish government. From 1915 to 1923, the world witnessed the attempted destruction of the Armenian people for no reason other than their very existence.

Unfortunately, the events surrounding the Armenian genocide are fraught with denial. But the case is simple. When Raphael Lemkin coined the term “genocide” in the 1940s, he had what happened to the Armenians in mind as a definitive example.

Those who perished experienced some of the worst aspects of humanity. But the campaign to exterminate the Armenian people failed. And those who survived embodied the best qualities of the human spirit: hope, resilience, perseverance, and love. Some survivors made their way to America, and many of them built their new lives in Michigan. They have created thriving communities, built businesses, raised families, and contributed to the fabric of what makes the State of Michigan so great. Their descendants carry on these values, and the richness of their culture is part of what gives vibrancy to our State.

The Armenians in Michigan boast a community of well over 20,000. It is the largest in the Midwest, and I am proud to represent them. To commemorate the 100th anniversary, Michigan’s Armenian community has organized a

number of events, lectures, art exhibits, concerts, and vigils to remember the victims of the genocide, to educate their communities, and to look to the future. I applaud their efforts to preserve their culture and identity.

Over the last century, the Armenians of Michigan erected churches, established community centers, and built a day school. They also founded educational centers such as the Armenian Research Center at the University of Michigan-Dearborn. International language and linguistics courses at Wayne State University are located in Manoogian Hall, which was named after the notable Detroit-Armenian philanthropist and businessman Alex Manoogian. These are just part of the Armenian community’s contributions to Michigan.

While Armenians have found prosperity in their new home, they have not forgotten those who did not live to see what the future held for their people. Many of Michigan’s Armenian community members have written books and recorded accounts of what happened to their families in 1915 in an effort to shed light and increase awareness. These stories will carry on for generations, and remind us all that if we do not recognize the atrocities of the past we risk blinding ourselves to the atrocities that could still occur today.

Charging toward a peaceful future requires making peace with the past. Denial does not serve our American values. Denial minimizes the great tragedy that fell upon the victims, the survivors, and their descendants. Over 40 States have affirmed the Armenian genocide, including Michigan. I have called on, and will continue to call on, the President to formally recognize that the atrocities committed against the Armenian people were in fact genocide.

Recognition of the Armenian genocide is long overdue. A crime like this casts a long shadow. This shadow can be conquered only by light—the light of truth that comes from fully acknowledging the full scale of the horror that the Armenians endured.

EARTH DAY

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, today is Earth Day, and on Earth Day it is important for all of us to reflect not only on how human activity impacts the environment but also how those impacts on the environment affect people.

Unfortunately, one of the impacts of climate change that is increasingly being documented by the military and intelligence communities is that climate change is a threat to our national security. This threat takes many forms. Perhaps the simplest manifestation is the threat of sea level rise on the Pentagon’s 700 coastal facilities. Naval Station Norfolk in Virginia is the largest naval base in the world, but the station and the surrounding community is being inundated by coastal